Abstract:

Taking as its subject Alexandre Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (1844-46), this article explores what the literary critic Alfred Nettement dubbed the newspaper's 'influence contagieuse' under the July Monarchy, and considers the impact of journalism on this ever-popular *roman-feuilleton*. Reading Dumas's text alongside the writings of nineteenth-century critics, the article traces the ways in which *Monte-Cristo* reflects on the pressures and rhythms of serial publication – not simply as a consequence of its structure but as a thematic concern crucial to particular strands of its meandering narrative. The problem of endings is central here, with *Monte-Cristo* emblematic of the ways in which the possibility of closure is repeatedly deferred in the *roman-feuilleton* – replaced, instead, by a series of *suites*.

Keywords:

Dumas; Nettement; Gautier; July Monarchy; journalism; press; *roman-feuilleton*; *la suite*; Ali Pasha; *Arabian Nights*.

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‘Les suites des suites’: Alexandre Dumas’s *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* and the News

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Beginnings, middles and ends – these, for the literary critic Alfred Nettement, were just some of the casualties of the *roman-feuilleton*’s inexorable rise under the July Monarchy. Writing in his *La Presse parisienne* of 1846, the conservative critic bemoaned the scope of the newspaper’s influence on the very structures of fiction, and underlined what he considered to be a decline in the nation’s literary appetites: ‘D’un côté, les longs appétits littéraires se perdirent, et de l’autre, les auteurs ne songèrent plus à faire des livres ayant un commencement, un milieu, une fin, et présentant un tout élaboré sous l’empire d’une pensée, ils n’écrivirent plus que des chapitres’ (1846b: 60). Critical disdain for the *roman-feuilleton* under the July Monarchy is well documented. Indeed, the idea that the triumph of serial fiction came to mark new lows in the perception of literary standards is a point at the very heart of the string of debates recorded in Lise Dumasy’s *La Querelle du roman-feuilleton* (1999). The *roman-feuilleton* was deemed, in certain quarters, both to corrupt the purities of literary form, and by extension to undermine the tastes of the reading public at large.[1] And with the above pessimistic assessment (one of many, it should be noted), Nettement taps into a story of national literary decline, one in which language, literature and public morality are yoked together in a narrative of spiralling degeneration. His is a vision which seeks to pinpoint the nefarious consequences of the rise of the popular press – a point crucial to his *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-*

roman: 'Le succès des journaux qui avaient opéré une révolution dans la presse périodique, devait naturellement exercer une influence contagieuse' (1846a, 2: 1).

It will be the aim of this article to explore the nature of the newspaper's 'influence contagieuse' in connection with Alexandre Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*. Here, I shall be seeking to trace the ways in which Dumas's novel of retribution and revenge reflects on the pressures and rhythms of serial publication – not simply as a consequence of its structure (the text was serialised in the *Journal des débats* between August 1844 and January 1846) but as a thematic concern crucial to particular strands of its meandering narrative. The intertwining of literature and journalism is, of course, a central tenet of much recent Francophone scholarship, and the present special number testifies to the uncertain bounds of this confused relationship between fiction and the press. In recent critical writing, after all, the author of *Monte-Cristo* sits precisely *entre presse et littérature* – to adopt the title of Pascal Durand and Sarah Mombert's edited volume on Dumas's newspaper, *Le Mousquetaire* (2009).[2] And in what follows, I intend to consider how the uncertainties of this position surface and resurface in *Monte-Cristo*. My argument, broadly speaking, will develop with reference to two particular concerns: in the first place, I explore the ways in which both *Monte-Cristo* and critical discussions of this ever-popular novel evoke the rhythms of serial publication itself, making reference to the *Thousand and One Nights* as a model for the *roman-feuilleton*; and in the second, I consider the representation of the press in Dumas's novel – notably with regard to the protagonist's manipulation of the news. In addition, I will be drawing on a number of texts written over the 1840s on the subject of this ever-popular novel (and, to begin, on its 1848 theatrical adaptation), with the aim of reading the narrative alongside certain critical reflections on Dumas and on the *roman-feuilleton* more widely.

Underlying much of this discussion will be the development outlined in Nettement's *La Presse parisienne* – namely a concern for the ways in which the rise of the news threatened to reconfigure the shape of fictional plots, the integrity of their beginnings, middles and ends. At stake, furthermore, will be the following contention: if the *roman-feuilleton* became a dominant (if maligned) cultural enterprise under the July Monarchy, then serial fiction equally provided a model for thinking about culture itself, about France and its history.

La Suite à demain

Whatever role Dumas's fictions continue to play in shaping popular conceptions of the French nineteenth century (and it is surely a significant one), there can be little doubt as to the perceived centrality of this totemic figure for the literary culture of his own era. Indeed, readers of Théophile Gautier's *feuilleton* in *La Presse* of 7 February 1848 might have been forgiven for concluding that the nineteenth century was, in fact, the age of Alexandre Dumas. Under the guise of a review of the stage adaptation of *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* – an adaptation performed over the course of two nights at the *Théâtre Historique*, with instalments apparently stretching to a running time of six hours each – Gautier waxes lyrical on the sheer ubiquity of Dumas and his *feuilletons*, and wastes no time recapitulating mere details of plot: 'Cela ne servirait pas à grand'chose', as he points out, '[t]out le monde sait *Monte-Cristo* par cœur' (1848: 1).[3] The scope of the *roman-feuilleton*'s influence emerges as Gautier reflects on a world of reading irrevocably shaped by Dumas and his fictions:

> Maintenant, on ne lit guère autre chose que les feuilletons d'Alexandre Dumas; leurs longs développemens, leurs suites et les suites des suites arrivent à se graver dans les mémoires populaires comme des faits contemporains; les aventures des nombreux personnages qu'ils renferment: — on les retrouve si

> longtemps le matin à son réveil qu'ils finissent par devenir des compagnons familiers de la vie de chacun (1848: 1).

Dumas's fictional creations appear, in Gautier's discussion, as ever-present companions in the cultural life of the age. And his review, as I hope to show, represents an appropriate point of departure both for considering various critical reflections on the significance of the *roman-feuilleton* under the July Monarchy, and for highlighting the ways in which endings find themselves perennially postponed in serial fiction – replaced, as it were, by a series of *suites*.

If Gautier's remarks lurch between the playfully reassuring and the vaguely threatening, moreover, they do so partly in response to the question of quite how seriously we should be prepared to take his particular argument. It might be tempting, for example, to identify the apparently inevitable presence of Dumas's fictions in the lives of various imagined nineteenth-century readers with what Richard Terdiman memorably labeled 'dominant discourse' in his 1985 book, *Discourse / Counter-Discourse*. As Terdiman argues: 'The narrataires of a culture – in some sense, all of us – know the dominant discourse by heart' (1985: 62). For just as Gautier's imagined readers know Dumas's fiction 'par cœur', so too is Terdiman's idea of the dominant characterized by the fact of its self-evidence – 'the discourse whose content is always already performable by the general member of the population' (1985: 62). The issue of the identity of this 'general member of the population' notwithstanding, Terdiman's is an argument which rests upon an uncompromising sense of the power of discourse and its reach across nineteenth-century society; it is an argument, moreover, which identifies the press as a privileged vehicle of such dominant discourse.[4] And something in Gautier's reflections on Dumas anticipates this particular conception of the dominant, the presence of a fiction whose content is,

apparently, 'already performable' to the audience in the nineteenth-century theatre. So much so, indeed, that the theatrical adaptation of *Monte-Cristo* depends upon the simple fact that this audience are, already, all too familiar with the twists and turns of the novel's plot: 'ce qui nous a surtout frappé dans la salle,' Gautier writes, 'c'est la parfaite et facile compréhension d'un drame qui ne serait pas sans obscurité pour quelqu'un qui n'aurait pas lu le livre; mais ce quelqu'un n'existe pas (1848: 1).'

I should not wish to overstress the ways in which Gautier's playful critique reflects certain of the lines of inquiry adopted in twentieth-century critical writing; the question of tone, for one, constitutes an utterly crucial difference between Gautier's jocular observations and Terdiman's pessimistic sense of the newspaper's dominance. Nevertheless, the idea (or even the fear) that a novel such as *Monte-Cristo* might represent some foundational point of reference – evidence of a form of cultural common ground – was a notion at the heart of the numerous debates on the status and morality of the *roman-feuilleton* conducted under the July Monarchy.[5] And what I want to pursue here is less the kind of argument sketched by Terdiman – concerned, as he is, with the issue of power and its limits in nineteenth-century culture – and more the question as to how certain ideas about the *roman-feuilleton*'s aesthetic came to dominate both serial fiction and various forms of critical writing at this time. Crucial here will be the idea of the *suite* – a central term both in connection with *Monte-Cristo*'s history as a serial novel (with the refrain *la suite à demain* closing numerous of its instalments in the *Journal des débats*) and with regards to certain of its thematic preoccupations. This closing refrain, of course, proves emblematic of a particular form of narrative contract, a point briefly raised by Christopher Prendergast in his work on mimesis, nineteenth-century narrative and modern French thought: 'What is literally bought by the subscriber to the newspaper', Prendergast writes, 'is a

guarantee of the satisfactions anticipated by suspense; the subscription is an advance purchase of narrative completion' (1986: 100).

If the newspaper subscription is indeed such a purchase, to echo Prendergast's analysis, then the much-anticipated moment of satisfaction – the end – finds itself repeatedly deferred, replaced, in fact, by a seemingly unending chain of *suites* (or, in the words of Gautier's review, by 'les suites des suites'). Reflections on *Monte-Cristo*'s theatrical adaptation drew on precisely the work's interminable quality, moreover, with one reviewer in the conservative *Gazette de France* joking that the *Théâtre Historique* might do better than to provide beds for its presumably exhausted audience (*Gazette de France*, 17 February 1848: 2). Gautier, for his part, points to the fact that certain Aristotelian principles appear to have been abandoned with regards to *Monte-Cristo*, and asks why Dumas's theatrical adaptation need conclude at all:

> Pourquoi n'ont-ils pas fait tout de suite une trilogie, une tétralogie, une pentalogie, une hexalogie, nous leur aurions accordé volontiers toute la semaine, car peut-on avoir autre chose à faire que de regarder dans le magnifique encadrement de la scène les pages de ce roman, qui a fait les mille et un matins de ce Schariaz qu'on nomme le public, et que nous avons tous lu et relu. (1848: 1)

Here, the structures of fiction are seen to impose themselves onto the rhythms of everyday life, with the possibility of conclusion pushed ever further into the future. Gautier's reference to the *Arabian Nights* in this context deserves particular attention, furthermore – for not only does this foundational text surface throughout *Monte-Cristo* as something of an *idée fixe*, but the structure of the *Thousand and One Nights*, according to various critical accounts, bears some connection to the organising principle of the *roman-feuilleton* itself (and to a narrative structure characterised by the play of postponement and resumption). As the historian Jeremy Popkin argues, the rhythms of the newspaper's production and consumption might be said to mirror the

structure of the *Arabian Nights*: 'Like Sheherazade [...] the newspaper envelops readers in a sequence of narratives that never reach closure' (2002: 14).

Critical writings on the legacy of the *Thousand and One Nights* in France, not least Dominique Jullien's *Les Amoureux de Schéhérazade* (2009), have been swift to highlight the ways in which *Monte-Cristo* draws on this particular collection of narratives.[6] The sense that both the plot and structure of Dumas's novel find inspiration in the *Arabian Nights* emerges in Julie Anselmini's discussion of Antoine Galland's influential translation, *Les Mille et une Nuits* dating from 1704-17, and its impact on *Monte-Cristo*: 'si Monte-Cristo puise dans le trésor mythique les moyens de créer un monde parallèle conforme à ses désirs, c'est dans le trésor du recueil oriental que le romancier invente les principes de son œuvre' (2005: 221). As we have seen in connection with Gautier, moreover, this particular parallel was an object of interest to various nineteenth-century writers, with Nettement evoking, in typically disparaging fashion, the relationship between Dumas's novel and Galland's translation: 'toutes ces belles imaginations, sans parler des invraisemblances de détail,' he writes of *Monte-Cristo*, 'forment un merveilleux ensemble qui fait quelque peu pâlir les *Mille et une Nuits* et les contes bleus' (1846a, 2: 373).[7] Indeed, the relationship between the newspaper and the *Thousand and One Nights* is suggested, in distinctly hyperbolic and orientalist style, by the legitimist critic in a discussion of the various limitations of the newspaper, *Le Siècle*:

> Qu'est-ce que le *Siècle*, mainentant? Un de ces cafés de l'Orient, où, mollement étendu sur des sofas, l'on fume le chibouck ou le narguilhé, et l'on prend le moka et le sorbet; un de ces conteurs arabes dont la vive imagination traverse en un moment le temps et l'espace, et double, par le mouvement sans fatigue qu'il procure aux intelligences paresseuses, les charmes du repos et les délices de l'immobilité. Au moment où nous parlons, M. Alexandre Dumas est ce conteur. (Nettement, 1846a, 2: 300-01)

In Nettement's writing on *Monte-Cristo*, we encounter a work of cultural criticism drawn directly from the set of images and motifs central to the particular fiction selected for critique: *Monte-Cristo*, of course, will capture the spirit of the above vision of chibouck-smoking splendour in the episode where the young Franz d'Épinay meets Dumas's enigmatic protagonist for the first time.

Evident in discussions of the novel dating from the 1840s, moreover, is the particular hold on the critical imagination exercised by that strand of the narrative given to the pursuit of buried treasure. The centrality of this motif is highlighted by Anselmini (2005: 213) and Jullien (2009: 53), and emerges in contemporary accounts of the novel – an idea noteworthy in connection with the second volume of Nettement's *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-roman*. The legitimist critic, whose writings were themselves frequently serialised in the conservative *Gazette de France*, offers a characteristically pessimistic assessment of Dumas's literary accomplishments (or lack thereof).[8] Chief among the failings of the author of *Monte-Cristo*, according to this particular line of argument, is the fact of Dumas's prodigious output – a point Nettement wryly relates with reference to various contemporary myths accounting for the sheer abundance of novels by Alexandre Dumas:

> Les uns veulent que M. Alexandre Dumas ait, dans quelque quartier reculé, une manufacture littéraire où des manœuvres sont employés à équarrir des sujets et à dégrossir ces premières inspirations qui contiennent le germe confus d'un ouvrage. Les autres aussurent qu'il a découvert, dans son voyage sur les bords de la Méditerranée, une bibliothèque enfouie dans des lieux souterrains, à peu près comme son Edmond Dantès découvrit, dans les caves du château de Monte-Christo [sic], ce trésor de plusieurs millions qui lui donne, à l'heure où nous parlons, la toute-puissance sur la terre. (1846a, 2: 305-06)

Rumours of secret factories are thus juxtaposed with the fantasy of Dumas's literary reputation as the consequence of a kind of windfall, akin to that experienced by Dantès himself. Here and elsewhere, Nettement's is an argument which aims to

connect literature, industry and productivity in language which recalls the thrust of Sainte-Beuve's celebrated 1839 essay, *De la littérature industrielle* (reprinted in Dumasy, 1999: 25-43).[9]

But Nettement's discussion of the profusion of myths around the author of *Monte-Cristo* deserves consideration, not least in connection with his reference to Dumas having uncovered some vast subterranean library on the shores of the Mediterranean (even if it is worth pointing out that Dumas's protagonist, on whom this particular myth is evidently based, does not in fact discover such treasure – as Nettement claims – in 'les caves du château de Monte-Christo'). The plot of *Monte-Cristo*, of course, turns on the fate of treasures lost and found. And the comparison of Nettement's remarks with a particular episode from Dumas's text will allow us to grasp one of the ways in which the novel reflects on a narrative logic governed by *la suite* – that is, by the postponement of endings, by a sense of fragmentation. I should like to evoke the moment in this narrative during which the protagonist, the unjustly imprisoned Edmond Dantès, first starts to believe in the existence of a magnificent treasure trove stashed away on the uninhabited Island of Monte-Cristo. It falls to the hero's ailing prison companion, the Abbé Faria, to convince an initially sceptical Dantès of the reality of such a hoard. This Faria does by presenting the protagonist with a scrap of paper, a fragment of which Dantès can make neither head nor tail: 'je ne vois là que des lignes tronquées, des mots sans suite; les caractères sont interrompus par l'action du feu et restent inintelligibles' (Dumas, 1981: 192; hereafter *MC*). But this seemingly illegible scrap of text has a history. And, in a story dating back to the days before his incarceration, the Abbé goes on to explain the fragment's peculiar provenance, and the secret message which it communicates.

Employed as secretary to the illustrious, though impoverished, Spada family, Faria came to suspect the existence of a remarkable family treasure, lost for many generations – 'comme', as he puts it, 'ces trésors des contes arabes qui dorment au sein de la terre sous les regards d'un génie' (*MC*: 198). Faria's research is meticulous, and the priest scours archives in search of the elusive will and testament of one César Spada – a crucial piece of evidence in reconstructing the story of this long-lost family fortune. Finally, the Abbé recounts the moment of his breakthrough to an enthralled Dantès. In the library one night, Faria inadvertently set alight what he believed to be an insignificant scrap of paper only to discover the existence of a hidden text, traced in some mysterious (and, until this moment, invisible) ink: 'je vis', he says by way of explanation, 'des caractères jaunâtres sortir du papier blanc et apparaître sur la feuille' (*MC*: 199). Immediately grasping the import of this discovery, Faria set about calculating – through a painstaking process by which he measured the particular length of the remaining letters, words and lines – the precise meaning of that part of the message already consumed by the flames. He offers these fragments, triumphantly, to Dantès, and in so doing encourages the protagonist to read one fragment alongside the other: 'rapprochez les deux fragments, et jugez vous même' (*MC*: 201) The priest thus presents Dumas's hero with two truncated scraps of text, the fragmentary qualities of which are visually reproduced in the novel in a bid to convey 'ce sens suspendu' or 'le sens incomplet' (*MC*: 192, 200) of the original passage.

http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5686434p/f42.image.r=le%20comte%20de%20monte-cristo

Only when these fragments are placed side by side, it would seem, can Dantès comprehend the sense of Spada's testament – and, crucially of course, the details of the treasure's whereabouts.

But the significance of this episode, I want to argue, lies not simply in the fact that it marks a turning point for Dumas's protagonist, with Dantès recast as a budding Aladdin. David Bell, in his reading of the novel, evokes Faria's reconstruction of this fragmentary passage as a means of exploring the narrative's interest in communication, information and technology: 'The message has been foreshortened materially by fire and must be expanded – first using a material algorithm, namely, the size of the letters and the standard length of the lines' (2004: 127). For Bell, the episode proves emblematic of a narrative fascinated by a profusion of codes, with Faria transformed into 'an expert at the techniques of data compression – he can pack and unpack at will' (2004: 129). But if the novel draws on precisely such 'techniques of data compression' at numerous junctures, there is nevertheless an alternative model of communication at stake here – evident, perhaps, if we shift our critical focus from Faria to Dantès. Indeed, the protagonist's position, when confronted with the priest's various scraps of text, comes to reflect that of Dumas's reader, for the novel itself constituted precisely such a discontinuous narrative – a work which depended on the assemblage of fragments, on the sense that a given passage might only prove significant in conjunction with its *suite*. Historical evidence, in this case the will and testament of César Spada, is in fact reimagined in serial form, pointing, as a *mise en abyme*, to the very processes underpinning *Monte-Cristo*'s circulation as a *roman-feuilleton*. These fragmentary scraps of documentary evidence thus underscore the idea that the narrative's constituent parts must be reassembled, and in the correct order, if the novel is to prove meaningful.

In miniature, then, we find in this episode a reflection on the rhythms of serial production. In seeking to move between critical discussions of Dumas and a particular moment in *Monte-Cristo*, I have been attempting to highlight the ways in which both fictional and critical texts from the July Monarchy became concerned with the idea of the serial, with a vision of literary and historical writing characterised as a set of *suites*. For just as the novel considers historical evidence as an allegory of the *roman-feuilleton*, critical approaches to Dumas – in this instance, the works of Nettement and Gautier – are at pains to emphasise the specificities of the novel's form, pointing to the *Thousand and One Nights* not simply as a means of noting an evident intertextual reference but to stress a structural analogy. In what follows, we shall see how such concerns continue to develop through the novel's treatment of the press, noting the significance of the role the newspaper comes to play in Dumas's narrative. Here, then, we turn from the structure of serial fiction and the scope of its influence – a particular point of anxiety for Nettement, of course – to the ways in which *Monte-Cristo* explores the newspaper, simultaneously vehicle of the novel's publication and instrument in the protagonist's quest for vengeance.

News from Ioannina

The presence of the press in Dumas's *Monte-Cristo* is not simply implied through various analogies (of the kind I have noted above); the newspaper in fact surfaces as an object of intrigue in its own right, notably in that part of the narrative given to protagonist's manipulation of journalistic copy in the public humiliation of his sworn enemy, Fernand de Morcerf.[10] Critical accounts – not least those of Bell (2004) and Durand (2003) – have underlined the fact that Dumas's novel is profoundly concerned with the rapid circulation of individuals and intelligence across both the nation and

the wider world, noting, in particular, the significance of the telegraph as a means through which the protagonist bends economic and political reality to suit his own specific ends.[11] Yet the newspaper equally comes to play a crucial role in Monte-Cristo's drive to recast the public narrative around his various enemies. Morcerf is drawn into a particularly debilitating scandal concerning dishonourable conduct in some (seemingly) long-forgotten military campaign – a scandal, it should be noted, which results in his suicide. Various newspaper articles (of apparently unknown provenance) point to Morcerf's alleged involvement with the betrayal of Ali Pasha of Ioannina – a point of historical fact which threatens to unmask the grubby realities underpinning his supposedly brilliant military career. This narrative of exposure, in which secrets from the past threaten to disrupt the status quo, is exquisitely choreographed by Monte-Cristo, and culminates in the appearance of Ali's daughter, Haydée – purchased as a slave by Dumas's protagonist – before the *Chambre de Pairs*; here, she denounces Morcerf in no uncertain terms, and his fate is sealed: 'Assassin! assassin! assassin! tu as encore au front le sang de ton maître! regardez tous' (*MC*: 1076).

Even a cursory description of this particular set of narrative developments serves to emphasise that orientalist logic evident throughout the novel's string of references to the *Arabian Nights*. Morcerf, after all, is found guilty of some transgression at the margins of French influence, with his betrayal of Ali – pasha of Ioannina, and ruler of territory comprising much of modern-day Greece and Macedonia – drawing the narrative back towards the Mediterranean world. In his discussion of *Monte-Cristo*, indeed, Nettement explicitly identifies the culmination of this narrative arc (Haydée's public denunciation of Morcerf) with the *Thousand and One Nights*, and, in so doing, points to a confused relationship between centre and

periphery – an idea which comes to the fore in his fanciful image of the *Arabian Nights* knocking at the very door of the Luxemburg Palace:

> Je le crois bien, sur ma parole, les *Mille et une Nuits* ne frappent pas tous les jours à la porte du palais du Luxembourg! Or, c'est d'une compatriote de l'Aladin des *Mille et une Nuits* qu'il s'agit; car la jeune femme voilée n'est autre chose que la fille d'Ali-Pacha, qui, dans le brillant costume de son pays vient accuser devant la noble Chambre l'assassin de son père (1846a, 2: 384).

And Nettement continues this line of discussion, imagining the unhappy work of the chamber's (presumably stunned) archivist, a certain M. Cauchy, when faced with this remarkable chain of events: 'Apercevez-vous d'ici l'honnête archiviste de la chambre haute, M. Cauchy, ne pouvant en croire ses yeux en transcrivant ce chapitre des *Mille et une Nuits* dans ses archives? (1846a, 2: 386). Nettement's rhetorical question, and his evocation of this transcription, point in unambiguous fashion to the supposed absurdities of Dumas's novel, caught – as the text surely is – in a confusion of registers: the fate of the historical figure of Ali (and that of his family) proves to be inextricably bound up with *Monte-Cristo*'s revenge plot. And in this moment, we find the recent past reconfigured to fit the dynamics of Dumas's narrative, a narrative in which distant conflict surfaces in private dramas of hypocrisy and betrayal.

Historical accounts of Ali underline a nineteenth-century fascination with this charismatic leader, frequently evoked, as K. E. Fleming points out, across an array of European representations (1999: 119). Indeed, Fleming even highlights this wider cultural interest in such terms as to recall the thrust of Nettement's criticisms of Dumas, evoking 'the West's delighted belief that in Ali it had found the consummate Oriental despot, a cruel and wily ruler straight from the pages of such popular works as the widely read *Arabian Nights*' (1999: 22).[12] Ali, indeed, was to prove the subject of part of Dumas's own *Crimes célèbres* (1839-40), a series of texts depicting various historical figures including Mary Stewart and Martin Guerre. This work, written with

Félicien Mallefille, captures something of the public fascination Ali appears to have inspired: 'la figure d'Ali-pacha se trouve être, sinon l'une des plus éclatantes, du moins l'une des plus curieuses de l'histoire contemporaine' (Dumas, 1840, 8: 308). And *Monte-Cristo* proves equally emblematic of such curiosity, with Ali – and his memory – serving as one of the means by which the narrative adopts a particular set of exotic tropes. The figure of Haydée, after all, could arguably be taken as a case study for that strand of discourse famously explored in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995), and discussed (or challenged) in numerous critical texts thereafter.[13] Monte-Cristo's 'esclave' – a term highlighted at various junctures in Dumas's novel in connection with Haydée (see *MC*: 962) – exists, it might seem, to satisfy certain of the protagonist's own narrative designs, a point which becomes increasingly evident following the revelation of her identity: 'Mon père, dit Haydée en relevant la tête, était un homme illustre que l'Europe a connu sous le nom d'Ali Tebelin, pacha de Janina, et devant lequel la Turquie a tremblé' (*MC*: 953).

While critical writing on *Monte-Cristo* has highlighted the novel's status as 'one of our first nineteenth-century portraits of empire', this particular epithet is not simply the result of the various exoticist tropes mobilised throughout the text. Bell, to whom we owe this observation, in fact sees the narrative's representation of certain lines of communication and connection as central to its conception of empire – a term he defines as follows: 'a network of communication that brought together far-reaching and disparate regions of the globe under the controlling power of nation states that held the monopoly on the telegraph lines and archives' (2004: 130). And what I want to stress here, by extension, is the strategic presence of the newspaper in Dumas's narrative, manipulated by the protagonist in aid of some private quarrel (and manipulated, it should be noted, precisely with the intent of overcoming the distance

between apparently 'far-reaching and disparate regions of the globe').[14] The idea that the newspaper is transformed into the instrument of personal ruin lies at the centre of narrative's treatment of the Morcerf scandal, an episode which sees Monte-Cristo's enemy named and shamed for treachery undertaken earlier in life. It is a narrative arc with which the novel's readers are, by this stage, all too familiar – for *Monte-Cristo* traces its protagonist's desire to reach back into the past, to right forgotten wrongs, to expose the false foundations which underlie glittering social triumph. The newspaper, moreover, is the appropriate forum for such endeavours precisely because its particular correction of the historical record brings the recent past back into the orbit of the news. As the novel's journalist Beauchamp explains: 'on a laissé le temps passer là-dessus, puis aujourd'hui on revient sur des événements oubliés pour en faire sortir un scandale qui peut ternir une haute position' (*MC*: 975).

What is striking about this particular episode is that once newspaper reports begin to circulate they prove profoundly destabilising; once cast, aspersions take on a life of their own – a point lamented by the young Albert de Morcerf (son of the disgraced Fernand and friend to Monte-Cristo himself): 'Vous ne comprenez pas comment quelques lignes écrites sur un journal peuvent mettre un homme au désespoir.' (*MC*: 1062). The apparent triviality of the newspaper thus belies its foundational status as a form of public record. And in the narrative's reflections on the relationship between the press, sensation and scandal, we note – once again – reference (a *clin d'œil*) to the fact of the novel's publication as a *roman-feuilleton*. If my discussion has explored a kind of self-reflexive turn evident in Dumas's serial fiction, the particular stakes of *Monte-Cristo*'s reflection on journalism and its discontents emerge most directly as the initial rumblings of the Morcerf affair begin to take shape in the pages of a daily newspaper:

> On nous écrit de Janina:
> Un fait jusqu'alors ignoré, ou tout au moins inédit, est parvenu à notre connaissance; les châteaux qui défendaient la ville ont été livré aux Turcs par un officier français dans lequel le vizir Ali-Tebelin avait mis toute sa confiance, et qui s'appelait Fernand. (*MC*: 974)

In a fashion analogous to Faria's fragmentary scraps of evidence – handed to the Dantès in the darkness of the Château d'If – this newspaper article, reproduced in the novel, points the way to some forgotten presence at the very edges of the nation (or, in the case of Ioannina, at the margins of French military influence). With the provenance of the newspaper's claim shrouded in mystery, furthermore, the details of such betrayal surface only gradually: Morcerf, it should be noted, is identifiable here merely by his first name.

And yet, the appearance of this revelation in the newspaper prompts a short-lived feud between the distressed Albert – concerned for the fate of his father's honour and, consequently, for the future of his family name – and the journalist, Beauchamp.[15] As a means of salvaging their friendship, the latter elects to journey to Ioannina with the aim of establishing the facts around Morcerf's involvement in Ali's demise. On his return, the veracity of the newspaper's claim is – unhappily – beyond doubt, a point Beauchamp relates to Albert with reference to the turbulent political cultures of the Restoration and the July Monarchy: 'Albert,' he laments, 'bien peu ont traversé ces révolutions au milieu desquelles nous sommes nés, sans que quelque tache de boue ou de sang ait souillé leur uniforme de soldat ou leur robe de juge' (*MC*: 1048). Here, transgression is explained in the light of revolutionary upheaval, with changing personal fortunes inevitably tied to the fate of particular political regimes. And while Beauchamp is describing Morcerf in this passage, his remarks might equally reflect the fate of Monte-Cristo himself. After all, Dumas's protagonist

is the victim of political conspiracy, his unjust imprisonment a result of the supposedly inconspicuous mudslinging of diverse foes. The evident flaw in that structural symmetry by which the protagonist's reputed crimes come to mirror those of his enemies is, of course, the fact of Monte-Cristo's innocence – his transgression, unlike that of Morcerf, is a fiction.

Despite Beauchamp's best attempts to supress rumours of Morcerf's crimes – 'ce secret affreux,' he asks of Albert, 'voulez-vous qu'il reste entre vous et moi?' (*MC*: 1048) – the fact of such transgression cannot, ultimately, be concealed for long. And it falls to another newspaper article, also reproduced in the novel, to break the news of Morcerf's activities in still more explicit fashion:

> Cet officier français au service d'Ali, pacha de Janina, dont parlait, il y a trois semaines, le journal *L'Impartial*, et qui non seulement livra les châteaux de Janina, mais encore vendit son bienfaiteur aux Turcs, s'appelait en effet à cette époque Fernand, comme l'a dit notre honorable confrère; mais, depuis, il a ajouté à son nom de baptême un titre de noblesse et un nom de terre.
> Il s'appelle ajourd'hui M. le comte de Morcerf, et fait partie de la Chambre des Pairs. (*MC*: 1063)

The press, in this example, contrives to lift the lid on past treacheries, endeavoring to draw out the various compromises (even the bloodshed) on which political reputations are ostensibly founded. The newspaper's declaration, indeed, appears as something akin to a return of the repressed, seeming to unmask a perpetrator whose crime had gone wholly ignored (and, in fact, unnoticed) by the vast majority: 'Ainsi donc ce secret terrible, que Beauchamp avait enseveli avec tant de générosité, reparaissait comme un fantôme armé' (*MC*: 1063). And in this apparently unwelcome return, the newspaper emerges as the symbol of a troubling disjuncture between past and present, a forum in which the fate of the great and the good is cast, suddenly, into doubt. In the Chamber itself, the newspaper prompts vital reconsideration of Morcerf's past:

'C'étaient des lectures à voix basse de l'article, des commentaires et des échanges de souvenirs qui précisaient encore mieux les faits' (*MC*: 1065). And the article's sheer ubiquity, at this moment of the narrative, even serves to signpost Morcerf's guilt, a discourse which promises to rewrite the very terms of the public record: 'On voyait le journal accusateur aux mains de tout le monde' (*MC*: 1066).

If the ubiquity of this 'journal accusateur' reminds us, however obliquely, of the supposedly unavoidable presence of Dumas and his *feuilletons* in the culture of the July Monarchy ('on ne lit guère autre chose que les feuilletons d'Alexandre Dumas', as Gautier quipped), then such a parallel is far from gratuitous: we find, in both Dumas and his commentators, a vision of French society peopled by scores of avid newspaper readers. The fall of Morcerf, indeed, offers up an image of political reputation at mercy of the press – even if those revelations which prefigure his demise emerge as the consequence of personal grievance (and not solely, or even principally, due to the wider interests of public knowledge). Behind both the scandal of revelatory newspaper articles and the shock of Haydée's stunning denunciation lies, of course, the controlling hand of Monte-Cristo himself, refashioning the public sphere in his single-minded quest to avenge the injustice of his incarceration. But the particular significance of this episode turns on the novel's critique of the culture of journalism itself – a point evident as the Morcerf affair develops. Here, it is left to Beauchamp to apprise Albert of the fate of his father, and the journalist's narrative provides the occasion for the following (remarkable) exchange:

> Arrivé au point où nous en sommes, Beauchamp s'arrêta.
> —Ensuite? demanda Albert.
> —Ensuite? répéta Beauchamp.
> —Oui.
> —Mon ami, ce mot m'entraîne dans une horrible nécessité. Voulez-vous donc savoir la suite? (*MC*: 1068)

In these remarks, the novel nakedly advertises its status as a serial fiction, a work which invariably suspends the possibilities of closure in favour of a plot borne forward in a succession of crises. And in this way, even *Monte-Cristo*'s treatment of the relationship between journalism and public opinion finds itself recounted in the language of the *feuilleton* – conceived, once again, as a series of *suites*.

Conclusion

In his discussion of the *roman-feuilleton*, first published in the pages of *Le Siècle* in September 1847, Louis Desnoyers endeavoured to counter popular denunciations of serial fiction, evoking the ways in which numerous writings adopted, in some form or other, the structures of the *feuilleton*. Indeed, Desnoyers even went so far as to claim that the social and cultural life of his age was one organised according to the peculiar logic of serial publication: 'tout n'est que feuilleton en ce bas monde, c'est-à-dire morcellement, succession, fragment, suite au lendemain' (Dumasy, 1999: 127). And in the confidence of this assertion – the sense that the structures of daily life might ultimately mirror those of the daily newspaper – we find an echo of the particular array of literary allusions and novelistic episodes I have tried to outline here. I have, in this article, sought to read *Monte-Cristo* alongside the reflections of its nineteenth-century critics, paying particular attention to Nettement's scornful characterisation of the newspaper's 'influence contagieuse' under the July Monarchy – both with the aim of highlighting the novel's foundational status in the literary culture of its own time, and with the intention of pointing out how the pressures and rhythms of serial publication came to shape the narrative itself. The text, after all, not only conceives of certain historical documents in serial: one strand of its sprawling narrative in fact directly concerns the newspaper's revelation of some (apparently obscure) historical

crime. The novel's numerous references to the *Arabian Nights*, moreover, serve to highlight a set of intertextual references at once thematic and formal, with the recent past reconfigured as some exotic escapade the end of which is perennially deferred – reimagined, it would seem, in serial form.

'We cannot, of course, be denied an end', as Frank Kermode reminds us, 'it is one of the great charms of books that they have to end' (2000: 23). And this proves to be the case even for a novel such as *Monte-Cristo*. But before we reach that end, I should briefly like to evoke a final remark from Nettement's *La Presse parisienne* – one which overlaps, in various ways, with Desnoyer's sense of the *feuilleton*'s ubiquity and with *Monte-Cristo*'s numerous references to the newspaper (both veiled and literal). On the subject of revolutions and their promises, Nettement touches on the sense of deferral supposedly central to the experience of revolution, and sketches the image of a world always waiting for tomorrow:

> Qu'on nous pardonne une comparaison bien vulgaire, sans doute, mais encore plus vraie que vulgaire: les révolutions ressemblent un peu à ce barbier qui avait inscrit sur sa boutique : '*Ici on rasera demain pour rien*.' Elles inscrivent sur la porte des contrées où elles dominent: 'Ici on sera libre demain.' Et ce lendemain qui doit apporter la liberté, ce lendemain qu'on fait acheter par tant de sacrifices, et de si cruels et de si sanglants sacrifices, ne luit jamais; chaque jour il recule d'un jour, comme ces lueurs trompeuses qui, fuyant devant le voyageur qui les suit, finissent par le conduire jusq'au bord d'un précipice. En temps de révolution, l'arbitraire, la violence, les proscriptions, la cruauté, c'est toujours aujourd'hui; la liberté, l'ordre, le repos, le bonheur, le droit commun, c'est toujours demain. (1846b: 104-05)

In the bleakness of Nettement's vision, the possibility of resolution is pushed ever further from the present, postponed always by single day. It was earlier in this same discussion, of course, that the literary critic noted the reluctance of writers to produce work 'ayant', as he put it, 'un commencement, un milieu, une fin' (1846b: 60). And, in his evocation of failed revolutionary hopes and dreams, the structures of the

feuilleton are, once again, discernable – with politics seen to conform to that logic memorably highlighted in Gautier's phrase about 'les suites des suites'. The fictional and critical writings explored here thus take the newspaper as a crucial point of reference – both an object of consternation and concern, and a means by which the very structures of daily life are conceived. The novel's final words stress precisely the indeterminacy of endings so frequently decried by its critics. And in these words it is impossible not to read the rhythms of rupture and continuity exploited throughout *Monte-Cristo*, from beginning to end: '*Attendre et espérer!*' (*MC*: 1398).

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Notes

[1] On the history of the *roman-feuilleton* in France, see, for example, Queffélec (1989, 2011); note too Lyon-Caen's discussion of the novel under the July Monarchy (2006: esp. 25-88).
[2] For further critical reflection on the relationship between literature and the press in nineteenth-century France, see Thérenty (2007). Note, in particular, her discussion of journalism and 'collectivité' in this work (61-77) – not least in view of the fact that a certain model of collective authorship was adopted by Dumas and his long-term collaborator, Maquet. On the subject of Dumas and the press, see Mombert (2011).
[3] On the adaptation (and with reference to Gautier's review), see Bassan (1995: esp. 98).
[4] For a study which challenges certain of Terdiman's assertions, see Popkin (2002: esp. 10-13)
[5] Diverse commentators, under the July Monarchy, stress the scope of the *feuilleton*'s influence (and I have already highlighted the Nettement's remarks on its supposed 'influence contagieuse'). Note in this context a chapter of his *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-roman*, 'L'Influence du feuilleton-roman sur la famille' (1846a, 2: 415-508).
[6] The relationship between the *roman-feuilleton* and the *Thousand and One Nights* is highlighted in nineteenth-century works as well as across subsequent critical texts. Note, in this context, Gautier's 'La Mille et deuxième nuit' (1863: 317-51). See also Jullien's authoritative work on modern iterations of this foundational text (2009: esp. 25-70). In a different vein, Brooks highlights references in Balzac to the *Arabian Nights* – in part as a means of exploring the history of relations between narrative and desire (1984: 168).
[7] For Nettement's commentary on *Monte-Cristo*, see his *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-roman* (1846a, 2: 356-412).
[8] Part of Nettement's critique of Sue's *Le Juif errant*, for example, appeared on the front page of *La Gazette de France*, 8 November 1844; numerous of his critical writings were published in this fashion.
[9] On public fascination with buried treasure, see Gautier's review of the theatrical adaptation of *Monte-Cristo* (1848: 1): 'Une chose qui occupait aussi beaucoup les imaginations, c'était de savoir la valeur de l'écu romain; le trésor caché par le cardinal Spada, dans la grotte de l'Île de Monte-Cristo, se monte, selon le dire de l'abbé Faria, à cinq millions d'écus romains. Quelle somme cela fait-il traduite dans notre monnaie? L'écu romain actuel vaut cinq francs sept centimes, ce qui fait un total de vingt-cinq millions et quelque cent mille francs, si toutefois la monnaie du temps du pape Alexandre VI était au même titre que celle du pape actuel, ce que nous n'avons pas le loisir de constater aujourd'hui. – Le dernier est joli, mais pour Monte-Cristo ce serait à peine l'aisance; aussi faut-il supposer quelques boisseaux de diamans et de pierres précieuses.'
[10] On the representation of journalism in nineteenth-century French culture more broadly, see Pinson (2012).
[11] Both Durand (2003) and Bell (2004: 103-30) highlight, in different ways, the relation between technology and communication in *Monte-Cristo*, with Durand stressing Monte-Cristo's 'maîtrise prodigieuse des techniques de communication, des transports et des médias' (216).
[12] Fleming points to Dumas – among other figures such as Goethe, Balzac and Lear – and notes that Ali served as a 'literary inspiration' at this particular moment (1999: 119).
[13] For further exploration of *Monte-Cristo* and orientalism, see Salien (2000).
[14] As Durand points out (2003: 216): 'Monte-Cristo est passé expert dans l'art de la manipulation.'
[15] On the figure of Beauchamp in *Monte-Cristo*, see Prévost (2013).